

VZCZCXYZ0000  
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHDM #0727/01 2861051  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
O 131051Z OCT 09  
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6921  
INFO RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD PRIORITY 0029  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 0739  
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 0698  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 0713  
RUEHUNV/USMISSION UNVIE VIENNA PRIORITY 0065  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0730  
RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 000727

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ELA, INL/G-TIP  
LONDON FOR LORD, PARIS FOR NOBLES

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/13/2019  
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PREF](#) [EINT](#) [KPAO](#) [KTIP](#) [KWMN](#) [OIIP](#)  
SOCI, SY  
SUBJECT: WHAT CARROT, WHAT STICK? PUSHING THE SARG ON TIP

REF: A. DAMASCUS 00554  
[1](#)B. DAMASCUS 00555

Classified By: CDA Charles Hunter for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: Deputy Minister of Social Affairs and Labor Dr. Issa Maldoon met the Charge and U.S. Speaker Program participant Dr. Lourdes Green on October 12 to discuss Syria's ongoing efforts at combating trafficking in persons (TIP), expand services for victims of domestic violence, and explore possible areas of cooperation with international and U.S. partners. Maldoon voiced considerable interest in Green's Second Chance Employment Service (SCES) for women victims of domestic violence, suggesting a willingness to employ such a model in Syria. He also assured the Charge that his ministry would be open to providing the embpFvrtbuFpP Qn germane to the annual TIP report. This was the first visit in recent memory between the Embassy and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor. End Summary.

-----  
Cooperation in Theory  
-----

[1](#)2. (SBU) After welcoming Green and praising her U.S.-based organization SCES, Deputy Minister Maldoon stated Syria could "benefit" from such an agency. (SCES, founded by Green, is a not-for-profit organization assisting women victims of domestic violence find employment.) Maldoon expressed a willingness to explore possible areas of cooperation with Green in the future. He also intimated a desire for technical assistance in developing a similar model, including the use of tracking software, which Green described as a key element of her program. He did not go so far as to recommend how his ministry might initiate any first steps in the direction of collaboration other than to promise he would pass her information to the Minister.

[1](#)3. (C) Maldoon took the opportunity to enumerate the SARG's current services to TIP victims and victims of domestic violence, nearly all of which have been covered in reftels. He was keen on pressing the significance of the "concrete steps" the SARG had taken in working with local and international NGOs to open women's shelters. And while Maldoon addressed himself primarily toward Green, initially, it was clear his comments were intended for Post's consumption.

[1](#)4. (SBU) "But we still suffer from not having a proper

system" for dealing with TIP, Maldoon sighed; "this is a new problem for us." The Iraqi refugee crisis and the "new phenomenon" of domestic servants had overwhelmed the country's immigration and law enforcement capacities. "There are 100,000 foreign maids in Syria," Maldoon asserted. (Note: we have heard from the Philippine Embassy that Filipino domestic servants in Syria number approximately 15,000. End note.) Though an anti-trafficking law had yet to be passed, Maldoon said there was a new law limiting and regulating the admission of foreign domestic workers. The new legislation also reportedly defined domestic workers' rights as well as their employers' obligations to them.

-----  
Cooperation in Practice  
-----

¶15. (C) The Charge took the opportunity to emphasize our willingness to begin a "broad conversation" on TIP-related issues with SARG officials. He acknowledged the Ministry's recent work in the area of protective services and hoped similar progress would be made in the realms of prevention and prosecution as well. The Ministry could, the Charge pointed out, also assist us in painting as accurate a picture as possible of Syria's anti-trafficking progress in our next TIP report by providing specific information on arrest and conviction rates.

¶16. (SBU) While Maldoon announced a willingness to give the Embassy whatever information he possessed, he quickly qualified his openness by saying the TIP portfolio was "shared by several ministries," including the Ministry of the Interior. As for the much anticipated anti-trafficking law, Maldoon told us the draft was in the final touch-up stages and would, he predicted, be passed into law before the end of the year.

¶17. (C) Comment: Getting in the door of the Ministry was a positive step in our slow engagement of the SARG on TIP reforms, which began with our August 5 meeting with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Office for International Organizations (ref A). Whether Issa Maldoon will be a lobbying force on our behalf remains to be seen. His strength inside the Ministry is dubious. Rumor would have it the Minister, Dr. Diala Haj Aref, has given him little real authority and deploys him only on those issues she finds of minor interest.

¶18. (C) Comment continued: However weak Maldoon's position is, there are signs the SARG will cooperate on TIP projects, as evidenced by its work with IOM, UNDP, UNHCR, and local NGOs and faith-based organizations. To that end, we see our continued dialogue with SARG as an opportunity to increase good will and open up a ground for future collaboration. The arguments for hurrying the passage of anti-trafficking legislation as well as for greater transparency on TIP prosecution figures might gain traction if combined with attractive capacity-building inducements. If the Department considers pursuing this course of action, it might consider ways to provide SARG-sponsored women's shelters and relevant governmental agencies with the kind of web-based tracking programs used by U.S. programs like SCES. We are unsure, though, that such software would be waiverable under the current sanctions regime. End Comment.

HUNTER